

8 function on the characteristic values of the users of the plurality of users  
9 related to the particular user.

1 2. The method of claim 1, wherein the electronic community is a community  
2 for the buying and selling of merchandise over a network.

1 3. The method of claim 2 wherein the network comprises the internet.

1 4. The method of claim 1, wherein the characteristic value is based on  
2 feedback received from other users of the plurality of users in the  
3 electronic community.

1 5. The method of claim 4, wherein the feedback is received from other users  
who have bought or sold goods or services with the particular user.

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1 6. The method of claim 1, wherein the set of relationships includes  
2 sponsorship relationships between the particular user and any users of the  
3 plurality of users that were sponsored by the particular user.

1 7. The method of claim 6, wherein the relationships of the plurality of users  
2 can be represented as one or more n-ary trees.

1 8. The method of claim 6, wherein information concerning the relationships  
2 between the plurality of users is stored in data structures for each user of  
3 the plurality of users.

1 9. The method of claim 8, wherein the data structure for the particular user  
2 contains a pointer to at least one user of the plurality of users that was  
3 sponsored by the particular user.

1 10. The method of claim 1, wherein a recursive routine is used in determining  
2 a community rating for the particular user.

1 11. The method of claim 10, wherein the community rating and the  
2 characteristic values are numerical.

1 12. (Once Amended) The method of claim 11, wherein the community rating is  
2 an aggregate of the characteristic value for each user of the plurality of  
3 users that is a lineal descendant of the particular user and the  
4 characteristic value of the particular user.

1 13. (Once Amended) A method comprising:  
2 maintaining reputation value on each user of a plurality of users  
3 within an electronic trading community through which goods and services  
4 are bought and sold, the reputation value being derived for a particular  
5 user of the plurality of users from feedback received concerning the  
6 particular user from other users of the plurality of users;  
7 maintaining a set of relationships between the plurality of users, the  
8 set of relationships including sponsorship relationships between the  
9 particular user and any users of the plurality of users that were sponsored  
10 by the particular user, where the set of relationships for a particular user  
11 can be represented as an n-ary tree;

12 deriving a community rating for the particular user by aggregating  
13 the reputation value for each user of the plurality of users that is related to  
14 the particular user through a linear sponsorship succession as can be  
15 represented by the n-ary tree in which the particular user is the root of the  
16 n-ary tree.

1 14. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for  
2 performing a method in a computer system for determining a community  
3 rating for a particular user of a plurality of users within an electronic  
4 community comprising:

5 maintaining a characteristic value for a each user of the plurality of  
6 users;

7 maintaining a set of relationships between the plurality of users;  
8 and  
9

10 deriving a community rating for the particular user by performing a  
11 function on the characteristic values of the users of the plurality of users  
related to the particular user.

1 15. The computer-readable medium of claim 14, wherein the electronic  
2 community is a community for the buying and selling of merchandise using  
3 an electronic forum.

1 16. The computer-readable medium of claim 15, wherein the characteristic  
2 value is based on feedback received from other users of the plurality of  
3 users in the electronic community.

1 17. The computer-readable medium of claim 16, wherein the set of  
2 relationships includes sponsorship relationships.

1 18. (Once Amended) The computer-readable medium of claim 17, wherein the  
2 community rating and the characteristic values are numerical, and the  
3 community rating is an aggregate of the characteristic value for each user  
4 of the plurality of users that is a lineal descendant of the particular user  
5 and the characteristic value of the particular user derived using a recursive  
6 routine.

1 19. A computer system for determining a community rating for a particular  
2 user of a plurality of users within an electronic community comprising:

3 a storage device having stored therein information and data relating  
4 to one or more sets of relationships between a plurality of users of an  
5 electronic community, one or more characteristic values for each user of  
6 the plurality of users, and one or more routines for determining one or  
7 more community ratings based on the characteristic values of each user of  
8 the plurality of users and the relationships between the plurality of users;  
9 and

10 a processor coupled to the storage device for executing the one or  
11 more routines to derive the one or more community ratings.

1 20. The computer system of claim 19 further comprising a network interface  
2 connected with a communications network over which data and  
3 information related to and including the one or more characteristic values

and one or more community values for each user of the plurality may be transmitted.